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ABSTRACT

The School Readiness Rating Scale was developed to help teachers organize their suggestions to parents about how parents can help their children prepare for beginning reading experiences. The scale surveys five important aspects of readiness for beginning reading: visual perception, visual motor perception, auditory perception and discrimination, language ability and verbal comprehension, and experiential and cognitive growth. A pilot study to validate the scale was conducted with 23 children. Results support the use of the scale as a useful tool, but limitations of the study leave the reliability and predictive validity of the instrument in question. Teachers may find it helpful as a quick screening guide and as a diagnostic tool. Parents can profit from specific recommendations made by teachers from the scale. (The scale is included.) (TJ)

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THE RRR SCALE

Parents and teachers, as well as reading specialists and researchers, are continually in search of effective, simple criteria for diagnostically evaluating the needs of the beginning school child. Parents frequently ask their child's pre-primary or primary teacher how they can better help their child prepare for beginning reading experiences. They realize that it is the classroom teacher who knows their child's strengths and weaknesses in a uniquely personal way and who is also able to combine this information with professional suggestions.

The author feels that a school readiness scale is valuable in helping teachers organize their suggestions along diagnostic lines. It can help teachers to meet a range of differences extending from the child who is not yet ready for formal reading instruction to the child who is genuinely interested in beginning to read before first grade. And it can guide them in developing a balanced readiness program for each child.

The purpose of this article is to report results of an investigation on the use of such a scale. This scale was used in conjunction with two other types of guidelines, a language-experience checklist, and a standardized pre-reading battery. The investigator hypothesized that teacher opinion, guided by the accompanying readiness checklist, would accurately serve as an indicator of individual children's pre-reading abilities. While diagnostic information would be available from the scale, the pre-primary child would not be subjected to formal testing. And the time necessary for the teacher to complete the scale would be minimal.

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The RRR Scale, or School Readiness Rating Scale, was developed to achieve this goal. It offers suggestions to the teacher in selecting areas which contribute to school readiness and in providing a systematic sequence of tasks within each area. It is neither time-consuming nor expensive. It supports the idea that teacher judgment has long been accepted as a relatively reliable indication of children's performance in school (Jansky and de Hirsch, 1972) and it provides structure for the teacher who intuitively understands the concepts involved in school readiness but would benefit from clear uncomplicated assessment procedures.

The RRR Scale, which follows in the next paragraphs, surveys five important aspects of readiness for beginning reading: 1) Visual Perception, 2) Visual Motor Perception, 3) Auditory Perception and Discrimination, 4) Language Ability and Verbal Comprehension, and 5) Experiential and Cognitive Growth. The first area, Visual Perception, is generally considered basic to readiness for reading since it involves the ability to see and comprehend likenesses and differences in letters and words. Research has suggested that the ability to discriminate, recognize, and name letters and numbers is an important predictor of later beginning reading achievement (Barrett, 1965). Visual Motor Perception, the second area, is basic to writing and school related activities. Completion of shape has been found to be an important predictor (Goins, 1958). Children should have many opportunities to try to print letters and words. Auditory Perception and Discrimination, the third area, refers to the ability of the child to recognize similarities and differences in words and parts of words. It has long been known that this correlates relatively well with beginning reading achievement when compared with other readiness variables (Gates,

Bond, and Russell, 1939). The fourth area, Language Ability and Verbal Comprehension, is an important one because language is used not only to communicate, but also to facilitate the thinking process. As reading is considered a thinking process, the bond between learning to speak and learning to read need be a close one (Stauffer, 1970). The final area suggested, Experiential and Cognitive Growth, recognizes the variety of in-depth experiences which are necessary for conceptual development. While each area plays an important role in the child's development, it is probably the general pattern of behavior in all five areas which is of most importance to the teacher. However, the scale is constructed in such a way that within each of the five basic areas there are five components which have been arranged in order of difficulty. This design allows the diagnostic teacher to assess each area and then plan appropriate activities for teaching to strengths or to providing instruction where weaknesses occur.

THE RRR SCALE

Directions To The Teacher:

You have probably thought a great deal about this child's instructional level as far as reading readiness is concerned. You have no doubt tried a number of school readiness activities with this child and have a good idea of the level you feel is presently most appropriate for this child. Relatively simple tasks are rated at level 1 and generally more difficult tasks at level 5. Read each of the items carefully and then from the five responses circle the one that appears to be more nearly correct.

A. Visual Perception:

1. Playing with shapes, colors, sizes, and textures on a concrete level.
2. Noting details in picture books.
3. Finding letters or words that are alike or different.
4. Learning to identify words in picture books, advertising, on TV, and in dictated sentences.
5. Arranging word cards to form sentences for creative writing.

B. Visual motor perception:

1. Enjoying experiences with clay, paint, chalk, crayons, and the like.
2. Tracing, copying, and naming letters of the child's printed name (using upper and lower case letters) and other letters on large unlined paper, or with colored chalk, or in sand or salt.
3. Using coloring books and enjoying other activities involving coloring within designated areas. Using tracing books and related activities.
4. Learning to make manuscript letters as taught in school on beginner's lined paper.
5. Writing creatively using manuscript printing and the child's own ideas.

C. Auditory perception and discrimination:

1. Discriminating between words on an auditory basis. That is, knowing whether the sounds in words such as man and can are alike or different.
2. Recognizing rhyming words on an auditory basis in nursery rhymes, poems, and records.
3. Recognizing on an auditory basis both rhyming words and words that begin alike.
4. Volunteering and producing rhyming words. For example, the child enjoys responding correctly when asked to give a word that rhymes with his name.

5. Enjoying volunteering or producing both rhyming words and words that begin alike.

D. Language ability and verbal comprehension:

1. Enjoying coversational experiences with an adult or older child who uses oral language well.
2. Receiving explanations about the outcome of the child's actions so that he may learn the relationship between cause and effect in terms of behavior and in learning new skills.
3. Playing verbally oriented games with toys, books, labels, categories, and the like.
4. Enjoying speaking activities involving descriptions, storytelling, role-playing, pretending, or dramatizations.
5. Dictating original expressions, stories, or poetry. Using language-experience activities.

E. Experiential and cognitive growth:

1. Using concrete objects, pictures, and art activities to expand concepts.
2. Participating in activities which sequence events and help to order the child's life.
3. Broadening experience through:
   (a) Concrete objects the child can touch, taste, smell, or feel.
   (b) Visitations to the grocery store, bakery, pet store, and the like.
   (c) Models.
   (d) Play activities.
4. Learning classifications and categorizations.
5. Predicting events which will occur in literature or future activities.

TOTAL RAW SCORE _____
(Total of all circled numbers)

AN INVESTIGATION COMPARING THE RRR SCALE WITH TWO OTHER INSTRUMENTS

In an effort to validate the RRR scale, a small pilot study was conducted. In this study, twenty-three children ranging in age from four years seven months to seven years, six months were compared on the basis of the RRR Scale, or Readiness Rating Scale, and the short form of the Clymer-Barrett Prereading Battery (1968). In addition, language-experience dictated stories were taken from each child and compared on the basis of Dixon's Language Experience Checklist (1977).

Rating, testing, and language experience scoring was done under controlled conditions so that comparisons could be made . All children were treated individually. The language samples were taken along the guidelines provided by Dixon, using as a stimulus, the green dragon puppet from the Level 1 Peabody Language Development Kit. As in Dixon's study, none of the children had previously seen the stimulus, they were allowed one minute to feel and manipulate the puppet while discussing it with the examiner, and each child was then asked to tell a story about the stimulus. Their stories were written down. The samples were then scored according to the checklist and appropriately weighted. Only total weighted scores from the checklist were included in this study.

RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The following correlations (Table I) were achieved between the RRR Scale, Dixon's Checklist, and the short form Clymer-Barrett Prereading Battery.

Table I

A Correlation Matrix for the RRR Scale, the Dixon Checklist, and the Clymer-Barrett Prereading Battery, Administered to Twenty-Three Children

	RRR Scale					RRR	Dixon	Clymer-Barrett
	A	B	C	D	E	Total	Checklist	Battery
RRR Scale								
A		.74**	.80**	.36*	.55**	.90**	.48**	.77**
B			.68**	.22	.57**	.83**	.27	.82**
C				.22	.46*	.84**	.45*	.81**
D					.39*	.51**	.41*	.09
E						.76**	.27	.49**
RRR Total							.48**	.80**
Dixon Checklist								.40*

Key

A. Visual Perception

B. Visual Motor Perception

C. Auditory Perception and Discrimination

D. Language Ability and Verbal Comprehension

E. Experiential and Cognitive Growth

*significant at the .05 level.

**significant at the .01 level.

As can be seen in Table I, the correlation of .80 ($p<.01$) between the RRR Scale and the Clymer-Barrett Battery, as well as the correlation of .48 ($p<.01$) between the RRR Scale and the Dixon Checklist, support the value of the Rating Scale. It is apparent at a glance, that with the exception of section (D), Language Ability and Verbal Comprehension, there is a significant correlation of each of the RRR Scale variables with the Pre-

reading Battery.

There was also a significant correlation of .40 (p .05) between the Dixon Checklist and the Clymer-Barrett Prereading Battery. This correlation, together with the correlations between the RRR Scale, the Clymer-Barrett Battery, and the Dixon Checklist, suggest the need for continued development of both the RRR Scale and the Checklist.

DISCUSSION OF THE INVESTIGATION

While this research supports the use of the RRR Scale as a useful tool, limitations of the study still leave the reliability and predictive validity of the instrument in question. Certainly, however, results suggest continued use and investigation of the instrument.

In this study the scale has served as a quick readiness screening guide. In almost all cases, the time spent in assessing an individual child did not exceed five minutes. For kindergarten teachers with large numbers of half-day students, this is an important consideration. The minimum expense of the scale also is an asset. Diagnostically, the scale is helpful in guiding the teacher to meet individual strengths and weaknesses. When combined with an interest survey, or Dixon's Language Experience Checklist (particularly Category I), the scale can lead the teacher to appropriate suggestions for teaching to individual differences and learning modalities. Such suggestions are useful both in the classroom or as recommendations for parents. Since it is generally agreed that successful beginning reading programs involve parental participation, (Quisenberry, Blakemore, and Warren, 1977), the value of the scale becomes apparent.

The scale also can be useful in research as a relatively quick screening pre- and post test. At present, work is underway to use this instrument as an assessment of children's growth before and after their parents participate in a short course designed for families of academic high risk first grade children. The rating scale will be used both as a research tool and as a diagnostic guideline for recommended activities for parents to use with their children.

It should be remembered that although Section D, Language Ability and Verbal Comprehension, significantly correlated with the language-experience checklist, it was the only area on the rating scale which did not significantly correlate with the prereading battery. It appears that the items in the language section do not offer as wide a range of differences as comparable items in other sections of the scale. It may be that several of the present language items are excessively dependent on school related activities. To further strengthen the scale, the current language section is being revised in an effort to increase its relationship with other diagnostic measures.

The raw scores in this study ranged from eight to twenty-five. While the sample size was quite limited, it appeared that children who possessed some reading skills generally scored twenty points or better. Those children who needed very simple, concrete, readiness activities and were not yet ready for a formal reading program scored below fifteen points. Additional study is needed to draw more reliable generalizations concerning ranges of achievement.

At the present time the RRR Scale seems to be beneficial to classroom teachers, parents, and researchers. Teachers can find it helpful both as a quick screening guide and a diagnostic tool. Parents can profit from specific recommendations made by teachers from the scale. And researchers as well can find its assessment of individual differences of value.

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